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CHAPTER III

MARRIAGES 婚姻 *Hun Yin.*

584 Betrothal may take place very early; friends will sometimes betroth their unborn children.

Marriage with one of the same family name is forbidden by law: but such marriages do take place when there is a different ancestry, 同姓不同宗 *t'ung hsing pu t'ung tsung.*

A male go-between is called 媒 *mei*, and a female is 妁 *cho*. Marriages are said to be arranged by 父母之命媒妁之言 *fu mu chih ming mei cho chih yen*, "Parents' will and middleman's words." The children are supposed to have nothing to do with the arrangements, but in fact their likes and dislikes count for a good deal.

Another name for the go-between is *hung-yeh* 紅葉 red leaf. The term originated in the T'ang dynasty. A female palace-slave whose life was made bitter by her imperial mistress wrote her troubles on a red leaf and threw this into the moat. A young scholar got it and forwarded a reply in the same romantic way. Later some of the slaves were married off by imperial orders, and the girl fell to the lot of the scholar without their knowing till afterwards that they had been the corresponding parties.

584 787 Preparing the horoscope before marriage is called *k'ai pa tzŭ* 開八字, preparing the eight characters. These characters give the year, month, day and hour of birth. The

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saying is, "The man's horoscope is never false; the woman's never true." A fortune-teller is called in to examine the girl's horoscope, and if he finds it is an unlucky one it will be falsified before being reported to the family with whom a marriage is sought.

It is said that in the time of Han Wên Ti 漢文帝 a barbarian chief wished for marriage relationships with the Chinese. The Chinese professed willingness, but warned the barbarian Man-tzŭ that it would be unlucky for them if marriages were made with unsuitable horoscopes. They were then able to decline marriage on the ground that 八字不合 *pa tzŭ pu ho*, the horoscopes do not agree. To this day, in refusing a proposal of marriage the people almost always say *jên k'ên hun pu k'ên* 人肯婚不肯. "We are willing but the horoscope is not."

The parents who seek a bride for their son first find a middleman, or more likely he finds them. They ask him to take presents to the home of a certain girl and to beg that her horoscope may be sent them for examination. The middleman has probably already paved the way, and he soon brings back the horoscope, which is put on the family altar for from 3 to 8 days to see if anything happens, good or bad. If a bowl is broken during this time, or something lost, or a cat or dog dies, the horoscope is promptly returned as being unlucky. This is called *t'ui hung kêng* 退紅庚. If on the contrary some piece of luck befalls during this period, an astrologer is called in to examine the two horoscopes and see if they agree. The comparison may show upper, middle or lower degree of suitability. If the boy's parents are satisfied with the horoscope they send the middleman to the girl's parents to say they feel quite unworthy to be related to such an exalted family, but since there was such condescension they were willing to fix the agreement *hsia p'in shu* 下聘書, *hui hua* 回話, or *ch'a hua* 插花. Much depends on the go-between, and as it is difficult to prevent bribery there is great need for caution and private enquiry.

The girl's parents reply 寫允書 *hsieh yün shu*, generally saying their daughter is weak and useless, but they are willing

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584 to give her to the others' exalted son to wife. Samples of the girl's needlework and embroidery are also sent for the boy's parents to inspect.

The lad's parents then draw up the *hun shu* 婚書 or form of agreement, leaving a blank space for the girl's name and other particulars about her. A lucky day is selected and presents of silk, chickens, ducks, etc., prepared. The go-between takes these to the girl's home, and asks that the particulars about the girl may be filled in on the *hun shu*. This done, he worships at the family shrine in the girl's home, using incense and candles specially bought for the occasion. Then presents are returned in the same box which brought the others, and the middleman or a representative of the girl's family worships at the shrine in the boy's home.

On the agreement are written the characters 天長 *t'ien ch'ang* above the boy's horoscope, and 地久 *ti chiu* above the girl's. The meaning is that the agreement is as lasting as heaven and earth. It is really as binding as any known in China, and the saying is that a lawsuit about a marriage agreement or about land will go through eighteen courts before being settled. Other proverbs are 說給猪跟猪走說給狗坐地守. "If engaged to a pig you must go its way; if to a dog you must sit down and bear it." And 說給叫化子提沙鍋也要跟到破蓆片. "If engaged to a beggar, pick up the earthenware bowl and follow the sleeping-rags."

In some cases when a family has become poor after betrothal and before the wedding, a girl will cut off her hair in the bridal chair, which results in her being sent home again. After this her only resource is to become a nun; yet even in the temple she may still be claimed by her betrothed at any time. In cases where parents wish to break off an engagement because the other family has become poor a lawsuit is certain. One man in such a case was bound down not to take a wife for his son till he had sent his daughter to her betrothed: thus cutting off the line of succession and putting both families on the same footing.

The home which is to receive the bride gets a fortune-teller to fix a lucky day; he also arranges the hour for every movement of hers. This is called *k'an nien yüeh* 看年月,

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and the announcement of the date to friends is *sïung* 送 *nien-yüeh*. This may be sent some months beforehand, after which presents are sent in, accompanied with music and flags. 584

When the date of the marriage is fixed the times for the following are also arranged: the day for cutting the bride's clothing; the day for placing the bed in position; the hour for 開臉 *k'ai lien*, or pulling out the hair on brow and neck to make the bride look older; and the time for putting up her hair. Till marriage all girls wear the hair in a queue; just before marriage it is put up in a coil at the back of the head. In asking if a girl is engaged it is common to ask if she has put her hair up or not, 上梳 *shang liu*. Times are also fixed for treading on the bushel; when she shall take leave of the family idols; when she must leave the parental roof; when she shall worship at the family shrine in her new home; and when the bridal cup shall be shared by the young couple. This partaking of the cup is called *chiao pei chiu* 交杯酒; it may be a cup of wine, tea or not a cup at all but a piece of squash, which they pull apart and both eat; it is their mutual pledge. All these times are fixed by the astrologer, are written on red paper and are announced to the bride's parents when the presents are sent, so that they may prepare accordingly. 585

Furniture, (chairs, bed, cupboard, etc.), are prepared by the bride's parents, quality and quantity depending on the family's means. The things are often given over to the bridegroom's representatives some days before the wedding, so that the bed may be placed in position on a lucky day.

The wedding things include tea-cups and tea-pot, flower vases, clothing for bride and bridegroom, etc., etc. A well-to-do bride will perhaps have hundred or more garments, besides bedding, curtains, mirrors, etc., more than she can use in a lifetime. The silversmith has to make bangles, chains, earrings etc., and so great is the expense of marrying a girl off that the saying goes, *ch'ien nü ju fên chia* 遣女如分家, "Marrying a daughter is like dividing the inheritance."

In some places some young, fat pigs are driven along together with the bridal outfit; in other parts animals of various kinds are sent afterwards as part of the dowry.

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The bride returns then to her new home for some ten days, and much of her future happiness depends on the way this time is passed. Then she goes to her old home for a stay of ten days, *shua shih* 耍十 or ten days' play; after which her new duties begin in earnest. 585

At the New Year the couple make presents to the husband's father, and again at the season for planting rice they send him wine; and this is the last of the marriage formalities.

The following proverbs refer to young wives 男教娶孩女教初來. "The best time to teach a boy is when he is a child; the best time to teach a girl is when she is newly married." And 三天孩子娘慣的三天媳婦婆慣的 "In three days a mother can spoil a child, and in three days a mother-in-law can spoil a daughter-in-law." 581

Sometimes a girl is sent to the house of her mother-in-law while still a child, and grows up beside her future husband till they are marriageable. This class of marriage is much looked down upon by most people. 584

When a widow re-marries the terms used are *ch'u hsing* 出姓, depart from the name; *ch'u mên* 出門, to go out of the door; *tsai chia* 再嫁 to marry again; *tsai chiao* 再醮 to drink again (the nuptial cup). 587

Her step-children call her *hou mu* 後母 or *chi mu* 繼母.

Marrying concubines is very common in West Ssŭch'uan, 接小 *chieh hsiao* or 娶妾 *ch'ü ch'ieh*. The limit in each case depends on the man and his purse. The saying runs 有志男兒接三妻. "The resolute man marries three wives." Of these concubines three are called wives, the fourth a concubine, the fifth and sixth are slaves, the seventh and eighth are big and little maids.

Sometimes a woman takes a husband to her home 倒住苗 *tao chu miao*. This is a remnant of the polyandry of the tribes. 588